

Bugging of Mandel Office Still a Controversial Issue

Last November, Edward M. Boyle was checking the personal office of Maryland Gov. Marvin Mandel for hidden bugs, a precaution taken about every two weeks. It was 9 p.m., and the Baltimore debugging technician had already spent five hours meticulously examining the walls, furniture, floors and phones.

One phone remained.

"I had gotten the word not to touch the 'hot line' phone," Boyle recalls. "But in this business, you just can't be too thorough."

Boyle opened it up, and what he saw in the red instrument soon made headlines.

Nearly three months later, the discovery remains an object of controversy.

Two facts are undisputed:

- The wiring had been altered so that the telephone became an open microphone, picking up sounds in the room even when the phone was not in use and sending them down the telephone cord.

- There was no evidence that the transmissions had ever been monitored by anyone.

A central question remains unanswered: Were Mandel's phones and those of five other Governors wired for bugging on purpose?

There are major differences between the accounts of the telephone company and evaluation of wiretap experts; between the company's own accounts, and between the company's reports to some of the affected governors before and after the story became widely publicized.

The telephone company says it isn't worth the time it would take to look into some of the unanswered questions. The government has openly expressed lack of interest in finding out independently what did happen.

The telephones in question are part of a National

Warning System operated by the Army's Office of Civil Defense. Essentially a giant party line, it connects the offices of 48 of the 50 governors with warning centers. The centers could inform the governors simultaneously in event of a nuclear alert or other national crisis.

The telephones were installed throughout the country by American Telephone & Telegraph Co. subsidiaries under contract from Civil Defense between late 1966 and early 1967, Lt. Col. Thomas D. Heath, a Defense Department spokesman, says.

To improve transmission quality, AT&T says, the network operated on four wires instead of the standard two. Each pair of wires could then be used for receiving or transmitting separately.

Rather than wait for four-wire phones, the telephone company in at least the six affected states converted two-wire phones to four-wire sets, AT&T says. In the process, the company says, 15 wires in the sets were moved—either connected or disconnected. About eight of the changes resulted in the bugging effect.

The telephones become open microphones because the switch hook—the switch that turns off the phone when the receiver is placed in the cradle—was bypassed, and the wires from the phones' earpieces were connected directly to the rear cords to carry sounds from the earpieces out on the telephone line.

Tapping Lines

The lines could have been tapped at any point between the telephones and their terminal boxes (which, in Annapolis, were in the basement of the State House). If a spare telephone line leading outside had been connected to the Civil Defense phone line in the

terminal boxes, the governors' offices could have been monitored from anywhere in the country.

No connection or attachment was found.

Could the new wiring of the telephones have been accomplished without the bugging effect?

Yes, says Joseph X. Gunzelman, an engineer with Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Co. of Baltimore, an AT&T subsidiary.

Why wasn't it?

The telephone company has supplied a variety of answers.

Initially, the company said the wiring that produced the bugging effort was an "error." The same error, however, apparently occurred in all six states—Maryland, Illinois, Delaware, Utah, Pennsylvania, and Arkansas.

However, Howard E. Robertson, AT&T general manager for government communications in the long lines (long distance) division, insisted in a recent interview that the wiring was not an "error" but rather a "deviation."

"There were no wiring changes; it was a standard set-up, but not the standard specified by the system's engineers," Robertson said.

All the bugged phones have since been changed to prevent eavesdropping, Robertson added.

How did the same deviation occur in all six states?

Robertson said he is not sure. In Illinois, he said, a wiring diagram prepared by the local company specified the changes that would result in an open microphone.

"Whether it (the wiring) happened fortuitously in the other states, I don't know," he said.

Who did the wiring?

In Annapolis, Robertson said, "I don't know whether the installer or the engineer wired it in this way." In the other states besides Illinois, "we don't know why it happened."

Tracking Installers

Could the installers who put the phones in be located?

"It's not worth the time to tie down," Robertson said. "This is a black-and-white situation." He later said phone company records don't go back that far.

Other phone company

sources dispute this. They say that the same company employees are usually assigned to state houses for a period of time, making it relatively easy to trace installers.

Robertson and Gunzelman also declined to make available wiring diagrams of the telephones in question, although they allowed this reporter to examine them at telephone company offices.

"It's too complex, there's too much possibility of misinterpretation," Robertson said of the diagrams.

However, one wiretap expert, Bernard B. Spindel, produced for The Washington Post what he said was an WT&T diagram of the phones in question.

It clearly specifies that the switch hooks is not to be bypassed.

Spindel, who died last week, had been acknowledged by both FBI and telephone company officials to

be the top private bugging authority in the country.

Spindel said: "A four-wire circuit with a so-called accidental miswiring of the earpiece is more than just suspicious. If you complained that you had a flat tire, there'd be no reason to rip the carburetor out.

"There is no justification for this except for eavesdropping. That earpiece must be shorted on hang-up."

Spindel said he had often used a similar device to bug phones. Except, he added, "When I do it, I drop a clear insulating fluid between two of the contacts. You can't detect what happened, and it saves moving a lot of wires. They're not too sophisticated."

Spindel contended that the switch hook is also a safety device; it presents fires by protecting the phone against power surges from lightning or fallen power lines before the carbon arresters in the terminal boxes have a chance to burn out.

200 Ways of Wiring

The phone in question can be wired in approximately 200 different ways for legitimate purpose, Spindel said. "The one thing that remains the same is the shorting switch."

Spindel added: "AT&T saying it's acceptable to bypass that switch is equiva-

lent to saying that under certain circumstances we wire a house without fuses or circuit breakers.

A former FBI soundman (wiretapper and bugger) said, "It sounds like a bug to me. We used to do the same thing."

Kennard Smith, a former Internal Revenue Service wiretapper, said, "Who are they trying to kid? No question it was a bug."

C&P declined to comment on the charges.

C&P also declined, with one exception, to comment on statements to The Washington Post by governors aides in four of the states—Delaware, Arkansas, Utah, and Pennsylvania—that their offices were first told by the phone company that there was nothing wrong with the Civil Defense phones.

In subsequent reports, usually several days later, spokesmen for the governors said the telephone company changed its account and said the phones were miswired, thus operating as open microphones.

In Delaware, however, a C&P spokesman said the local company had "indicated there was nothing wrong initially . . . after queried by long lines, they realized it (the phone) did not conform to original specifications."

Asked if the Justice Department had investigated the incident, Attorney General John N. Mitchell said in an interview, "There was a personal investigation by me through the branch" of the military responsible, later identified as Civil Defense. "The equipment was deficient," he said.

But Lt. Col. Heath said the Defense Department "made no investigation." Instead, he said, the Department asked AT&T for a report.